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SUBJECT: ANOTHER FIVE YEARS FOR CHAD'S PRESIDENT DEBY

Classified By: Ambassador Marc Wall for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On August 8, after nearly sixteen years in power, President Deby rolled out the red carpet for himself and ten visiting African heads of state in a celebration to honor his claim to five more. The ceremony was marked by public displays of Chad's new rapprochement with Sudan and of the arrival of China as Chad's new diplomatic partner. The inauguration caps a series of bold moves by Deby to make peace with his adversaries at home and abroad. He has earned a respite from the fights that have threatened to undo his regime, but the pressures on him will not abate indefinitely. Chances for a durable peace inside Chad and on its borders depend on initiatives to demonstrate his seriousness about reconciling with his opponents and implementing reforms. END SUMMARY

Deby Throws a Bash

¶2. (SBU) President Idriss Deby Itno threw himself a lavish party August 8 to celebrate his inauguration for a third five-year term in power. The heads of state of Gabon, Senegal, Congo-Brazzaville, Central African Republic, Mali, Togo, Equatorial Guinea, and Mauritania showed up, but the star guests were Libya's Mouammar Qadhafi and Sudan's Omar Bashir. None of the dignitaries is likely to have appreciated the irony of driving from the airport on a Taiwan-built road, staying in a Libyan-built hotel, and attending the ceremonies in the Chinese-built conference hall that had been the target of the rebel attack on April 13. President Deby gave a conciliatory speech, followed by a 21-gun salute. But the highlight of the event came when, at Qadhafi's prompting, Bashir joined him on the stage to

congratulate Deby in a three-way embrace. The other crowd-pleaser was the arrival of the PRC delegation, just two days after establishment of diplomatic relations. The group had already found their seats when the head of the delegation was called backstage with the other special envoys. When it came his turn to be announced and he strode back into the auditorium, he was greeted with a rousing ovation.

13. (SBU) Immediately after the ceremonies, Deby, Bashir, and Qadhafi joined Gabon's Omar Bongo and Congo-Brazzaville's and African Union President Denis Sassou Nguesso in the garden of their hotel in a meeting to declare peace between Chad and Sudan. The two countries will reestablish diplomatic relations and open their borders, while their foreign ministers work out the details. Evidently in a gesture to make up to Senegal's President Abdoulaye Wade for permitting Qadhafi to steal the show at the inauguration and not including him in the garden party that followed, Deby sent his prime minister and foreign minister to Dakar the next day for talks about a future summit meeting.

Deby's Comeback

14. (SBU) The ceremony caps a remarkable comeback for the beleaguered president. Only last March Deby was facing mutinies, desertions, and rebel incursions on virtually a weekly basis. Blaming it all on Khartoum-backed mercenaries, he severed diplomatic relations with Sudan. At the same

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time, he was shunned by his political opposition, locked in a bitter feud with the World Bank, and threatening to expel Sudanese refugees and shut down oil production. His fortunes changed dramatically in the coming weeks. By early May, he had beaten back a rebel assault on N'Djamena, reached a truce with the World Bank, pulled off a flawed presidential election, and learned of the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement that promised to stabilize his volatile eastern border with Sudan.

15. (SBU) In recent weeks, Deby not only reached the rapprochement with Khartoum, but also consolidated gains in other areas. With the agreement negotiated with the World Bank July 14 and the visit by President Paul Wolfowitz July 20, he committed to implementing budgetary reforms and spending the bulk of all oil revenues to help reduce poverty, in exchange for the immediate release of over \$130 million in oil royalty payments held in the blocked account and a resumption in the World Bank's lending program. In another move to defuse pressure on his eastern front, he abruptly acted to reestablish relations with the PRC, presumably in hopes of working toward an understanding with Beijing on arms transfers to Chadian rebels or support for Chad's cause in the United Nations. And bowing to appeals for launching a national political dialogue, he staged a highly scripted conference that his credible political opposition boycotted, but that nevertheless came out with a few useful proposals to fix the legislative and municipal elections next year.

Uncertain Prospects

16. (C) Only in his overtures to the armed rebels have Deby's efforts not had any apparent results. His foreign minister and other envoys seem to have come back empty handed from their efforts in Paris to establish contacts with representatives of the rebellion. But Deby's luck is holding even here. The Chadian rebel forces remain in disarray, hating each other almost as much as they hate Deby himself. The onset of the rainy season has stopped virtually all vehicle movements on Chad's southern and southeastern borders. The start of Ramadan in late September will put a

damper on any rebel maneuvers even as the terrain begins to dry out. By next March, when Esso's tax payments begin to gush into Chad's treasury, Deby will have more than enough resources left over from his agreement with the World Bank to pay off his enemies and military suppliers.

17. (C) The revival in Deby's fortunes does not mean he can look forward to a trouble-free five more years in power. A more likely scenario involves incursions and rebel attacks starting up again later this year, the ever-present threat of palace coups, and half-hearted and unreciprocated gestures aimed at reconciling with his political opponents. Based on his track record, he will survive, but remain vulnerable and besieged. The unremitting pressures on him will not put him in a mindset to support the political opening necessary to reconcile with his opponents and ensure a durable peace on his borders. Indeed, flush with oil money, bolstered by a new relationship with the Chinese, and soon without President Chirac, the only Western leader he listens to, in a position to counsel him, Deby may be tempted to go his separate way.

18. (C) On the other hand, in the aftermath of the inauguration and the victories leading up to it, Deby may be

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ready to choose another course. He may determine that this respite can be used as an opening to pursue a program of reconciliation and reform. After sixteen years in power, it will not be easy for him to persuade his opponents that his next five years will be much different. To be convincing, he needs to take the initiative now by appointing a new government with powers to implement reforms, revamping the electoral system before the legislative elections next year, and committing to a plan for stepping down in five years. We should continue to encourage him to move in this direction.
WALL